

THE LURE OF MEDICAL HISTORY†

JOSEPH POMEROY WIDNEY, A. M., M. D.,
D. D., LL. D.

FOUNDER OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION AND OF THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA,
CIVIC WORKER AND AUTHOR: SOME BIO-
GRAPHICAL NOTES ON A COLLEAGUE,
WHO, AT THE AGE OF 95, STILL
"CARRIES ON"

By E. T. W.

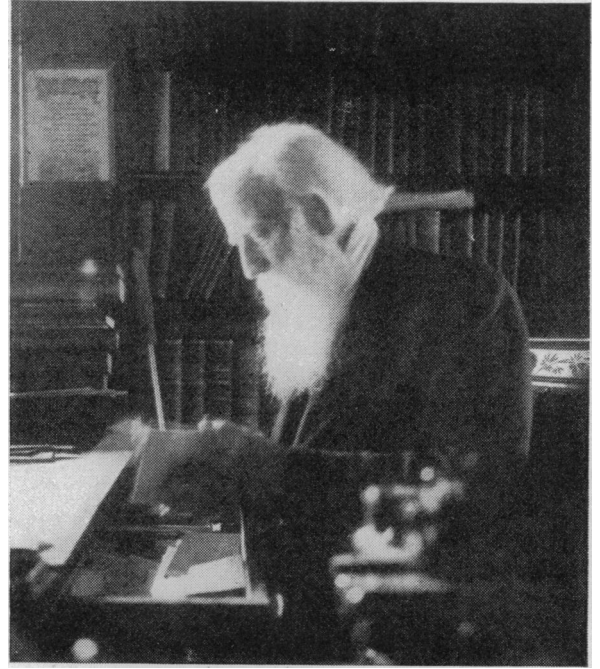
PART II*

WORK OF JUDGE R. M. AND DR. JOSEPH P. WIDNEY
IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, AND ITS
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

THE distinguished brothers, Judge R. M. and Dr. J. P. Widney, acting on a suggestion from the former, having with others taken the initiative to found an institution of higher learning in Los Angeles, the State, in 1880, granted a charter for the University of Southern California; and five years later, the board of trustees empowered Doctor Widney to take steps toward the organization of a medical department of the university. The Doctor, therefore, on March 31, 1885, called together at his office in the Widney Building (erected in 1883, on First Street, on land now a part of the new City Hall ground), the first faculty, and formally established "The College of Medicine of the University of Southern California." Doctor Widney was elected dean of the faculty; and for ten years he filled that office, at the same time occupying the chairs of theory and practice of medicine, and medical Latin.

The first session of the college was held in a brick building, long standing at 447 Aliso Street, and there the work of instruction was carried on for several years. Doctor Widney owned the property, and he still owns part of it. There were no funds available for rent, and he allowed the college to use the property rent-free for the entire period except the first few months, when a number of repairs had to be made. The building had long been the residence of Don Louis Vignes, the owner of a very extensive vineyard and a producer of famous wine, who made his home upstairs in the second and third stories, and had a basement for his business below. With the building of the proposed Union Station, some of this property will be appropriated for a new street.

From the beginning, everybody associated with the movement was enthusiastic to create a medical



JOSEPH P. WIDNEY, M.D.

From a photograph, taken in his library.

college "equal to any in the United States"; and when once established, it soon went beyond many others in its requirements, since elsewhere such a course usually meant practically only five or six months of work, and then a supplemental term of less earnestness and efficiency. "I was told," said Doctor Widney, "'you will need to make the course lighter for the year in order to draw students.' 'No!' I replied, 'we will make it heavier.' I wrote to Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, and secured their catalogues. Each was running a three-year course. Each year had nine months of work, divided into two terms—five months of solid work, and then four supplemental months, called the summer term. The work of this term was lighter and less earnest, and so was much neglected. Instead of that arrangement, we adopted and enforced a continuous term of nine months of unbroken, solid work, and this at once put the Los Angeles College in the front with the best medical schools in the United States. The result was shown in the standing of the graduates, as seen in a letter I received from a large city where some of our students had competed for positions as hospital internes. The examining board wrote to me: 'You have sent us the best-trained graduates that have ever appeared before us.' The rank of our college was thus established almost in its first year, and not in the United States alone, but in Canada as well." This was particularly gratifying to Doctor Widney, who himself had picked out his colleagues, and who, foreseeing that some day the financial needs of the institution might make it advisable to keep it free from affiliations, so held the school under his personal control that the appointment of the other professors was never confirmed by the university

† A Twenty-five Years Ago column, made up of excerpts from the official journal of the California Medical Association of twenty-five years ago, is printed in each issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE. The column is one of the regular features of the Miscellany department, and its page number will be found on the front cover.

* Part I was printed in the April issue, on page 292.

Correction of typographical error in Part I. In the third last paragraph of the first column footnote printed on page 295 of the April issue, the year 1891 should have been 1871. The historical sketch to which reference was made was presented by the late H. Bert. Ellis in 1891.

authorities. Nine students were the first graduates, forming the Class of '88:[†] Charles P. Bagg, W. W. Beckett, Edward R. Bradley, Frank D. Bullard, H. Bert Ellis, Lula Talbot Ellis, P. J. O'Neil, W. C. Thiele, and Anthony C. Vallee. During his incumbency as dean, Doctor Widney often substituted for one or another of the professors, teaching in their absence, fortunately being able to instruct in any of the departments; and sometimes he gave as many as three one-hour lectures in succession. There was then no county hospital, and patients dependent on the county for relief were "farmed out" to the Sisters of Charity in their hospital. Free use of this hospital was had for clinical instruction, and there was also established a large free clinic at the College Building, affording all the clinical material that could be used.[§]

[†] Of this class, the late H. Bert. Ellis was later elected president of the California Medical Association, and for years served as one of the Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association. Dr. W. W. Beckett, still living, was also elected to the presidency of the California Medical Association, and continues in active work as chief of the medical department of the Pacific Mutual Insurance Company. The late Dr. Charles P. Bagg rose to high rank in the Medical Corps of the United States Navy.

[§] Editor's Note.—By mere chance, in looking up references in the minute book of the old College of Medicine of the University of Southern California, to which he had had no occasion to refer in years, the editor came across the paragraphs which are printed below.

From the minutes of the meeting of October 12, 1896:
" . . . The committee on resolutions in regard to the resignation of Dr. J. P. Widney as dean of the College, reported and were discharged.

"WHEREAS, Joseph P. Widney, A. M., M. D., LL. D., one of the founders and continuously until now the dean of the College of Medicine of the University of Southern California has retired from the practice of medicine, and owing to imperative demands on his time in other directions, has tendered his resignation as dean; now, therefore, be it

"Resolved, That we, the members of the faculty of the College of Medicine recognize that Doctor Widney has been chiefly instrumental in maintaining the high standard of our college;

"Resolved, That as a fellow teacher and practitioner, we recognize in Doctor Widney an honorable gentleman, a thorough scholar and an unselfish friend;

"Resolved, That while we yield and accept his resignation, yet we hereby tender to him the titles of Honorary Dean, and Emeritus Professor of Medicine, thus perpetuating the history of his work with us and in some small degree expressing our appreciation of the same.

"H. BERT. ELLIS, M. D.
"WALTER LINDLEY, M. D.
"WILLIAM L. WILLS, M. D."

It is interesting to note that the report presenting the resolutions when Doctor Widney resigned as dean, was signed by three members of the California Medical Association, each of whom, in his day, had been president of the California Medical Association (Dr. Walter Lindley in 1890, Dr. William LeMoyne Wills in 1896, and Dr. H. Bert. Ellis in 1904).

The two other items are of equal historic interest, because the one tells how the College of Dentistry of the University of Southern California (now one of the largest dental schools of the United States) came into existence, and the other, how the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles (one of the notable institutions of its kind in America) was founded.

From the minutes of the meeting of July 9, 1897:
" . . . The subject of the establishment of a Dental Department came up and was discussed by all present. It was moved and carried that the entire matter be referred to a committee consisting of Doctors Kurtz and the Dean [Widney] with power to act."

From the minutes of the meeting of August 3, 1901:
" . . . On motion of Doctor MacGowan, Doctors Brainerd and Wills were appointed a committee to investigate the founding of a Children's Hospital, and to report at some future meeting."

Of additional historical interest concerning the part taken in medical organization work in California by the College of Medicine of the University of Southern California, is the fact that up to the present time every member of the California Medical Association who was

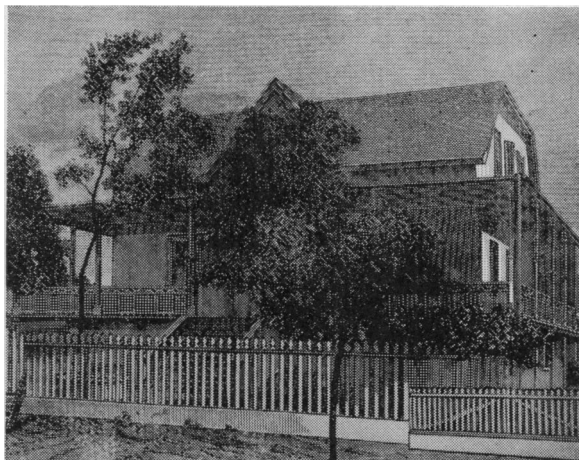


Fig. 1.—The first home (year 1885) of the College of Medicine, University of Southern California, at 445 Aliso Street, Los Angeles.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA: PREVENTS FORECLOSURE ON THE UNIVERSITY PROPERTY

Doctor Widney remained dean until, on the death of President M. M. Bovard, the trustees of the university requested him to take the presidency, saying: "You will have to do so to save the university." He had, however, a lucrative practice, which it would be necessary to abandon, and so he said to the trustees: "Take a month to think the matter over; discuss it with the directors, and with business men of the town, and if everybody concerned is still of the same opinion, come back to me." They returned, and in their reiteration, he "recognized a call of the Lord"; he accepted the presidency, and was with the big work of construction and reconstruction for four or five years. Everything was in confusion; they were in the midst of the bank crash of '93, and no one knew what property the university had, or what it was worth. The professors had not been paid for months, and relief was not to be had through the banks, which withdrew credit. So Doctor Widney went out on the street and raised \$15,000, giving his own personal security to back up the loans. Suit had already been filed to foreclose on the university property; but he

ever elected to the presidency of the California Medical Association, and who resided in the city of Los Angeles, without exception has been either a graduate or a faculty member of the College of Medicine. The names of the twelve members of the California Medical Association who have been thus honored, with the nature of their college affiliation, is given below:

- * Henry S. Orme, president in 1879; faculty.
- * Walter Lindley, president in 1890; faculty.
- * William LeMoyne Wills, president in 1896; faculty.
- * H. Bert. Ellis, president in 1904; class of 1888; graduate and faculty.
- Wesley W. Beckett, president in 1909; class of 1888; graduate and faculty.
- George H. Kress, president in 1917; faculty.
- * Henry G. Brainerd, president in 1923; faculty.
- * Granville MacGowan, president in 1925; faculty.
- * William T. McArthur, president in 1927; faculty.
- William H. Kiger, President in 1929; faculty.
- Joseph M. King, president in 1933; class of 1895; graduate and faculty.
- Clarence M. Toland, president in 1935; faculty.
- Edward M. Pallette, president-elect, in 1936; class of 1898; graduate and faculty.

* Deceased.

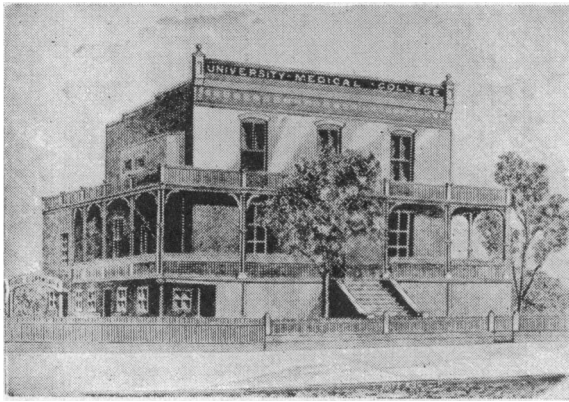


Fig. 2.—The original building of the College of Medicine of the University of Southern California (after it was remodeled in the year 1888).

paid the bills and got the suit stopped. From then on, every bill was paid when it came due, and every professor received his check at the end of each month.* Having sufficient private means that it was not necessary for him to continue practicing medicine, and not wishing to compete with the college professors maintaining such practice, Doctor Widney also discontinued active work as a physician and surgeon, and thereafter treated only a few of his personal friends. But his interest in educational work was not confined to the upbuilding of the University of Southern California; he consented to become a member of the Los Angeles Board of Education, and was president of that body for one or two terms. At the commencement of his service, there were but three school buildings in town; but with commendable foresight, he saw what was coming, secured a lot with a frontage of one hundred feet on Spring Street and running back to Broadway, between Fifth and Sixth streets (later known as Mercantile Place), and several other lots, one as far out as Brooklyn Heights. As proof of that wisdom, the Mercantile Place property eventually sold for a high price, making possible further expansion of the Los Angeles school system. As influential executive, Doctor Widney also favored the employment of a superintendent, and Dr.

* From a 112-page booklet entitled "Six Collegiate Decades, The Growth of Higher Education in Southern California" published in 1929 by the Security-First National Bank, are taken these interesting paragraphs:

"For three months in the winter of 1887 Los Angeles real estate sales averaged over \$12,000,000 per month. Eighteen months later land could not be given away. The inescapable collapse, after the peak of the boom inflation in 1887 had passed, fell upon the infant colleges of the Southland with staggering effect. In common with Pomona and Occidental, the University of Southern California passed through a heart-breaking period of financial depression which reached its darkest days in 1893.

"On December 30, 1891, President Bovard died. With finances in a precarious state and the administrative system almost completely shattered by his death, the University of Southern California faced the great crisis of its existence.

"It was a physician who proved to be the man of the hour to heal the university of these blows. Under the vigorous and cheerful leadership of Dr. J. P. Widney, a brother of the founder, the drooping spirits of faculty and students were revived. The University of Southern California reversed its policy of extension and expansion, and entered upon an earnest program of concentration and centralization."

"But the idea of the university had been born several years before, in the mind of Judge Robert Maclay Widney, a pioneer of 1868. After the death of Reverend Tansey in 1876, it remained for this man to take the leading rôle in the unfolding events that made his early dream of a university in Los Angeles come true."

W. T. Lucky, an excellent pedagogue, was selected at a salary of \$5,000, although that compensation was considered by many rather high for such services.

AFFILIATION OF THE MEDICAL SCHOOL WITH THE STATE UNIVERSITY

Speaking of the affiliation of the College of Medicine, of which he was the founder and guiding spirit, with the State University, as its Los Angeles Medical Department, Doctor Widney says: "When I was no longer dean of the School of Medicine, it became involved in financial troubles in trying to maintain its standards and broaden its work, and representatives of the faculty came to me; wherefore I told them what I had in mind for so long a time. At their request, I went north in company with Dean W. Jarvis Barlow and several of the professors, including Doctors H. Bert. Ellis, H. G. Brainerd and Granville MacGowan, to attend a meeting of the Regents of the University of California, and we asked that the medical school at Los Angeles be made a part of the state university system. The petition we presented was granted when the Regents agreed to take over the property of the College of Medicine and make an appropriation for its maintenance. Wishing, however, that all of our students of the past who had received degrees should also have as their alma mater the new mother, we effected in addition the provision that each graduate of the College of Medicine of the University of Southern California, duly certified by a specially appointed Alumni Committee,* should be listed as an alumnus of the University of California." This affiliation took place in the year 1909, the Los Angeles Medical Department carrying on undergraduate courses through 1914, after which time it offered courses only to medical graduates.

PROPAGANDIST FOR THE PORT OF SAN PEDRO

The practice of his medical and educational work for years demanded the major part of Doctor Widney's attention and time; but through these very activities he aided in advancing numerous important movements, and someone has well said of him that "he was a zealous promoter, for several decades, of every public enterprise in Los Angeles." And by no means alien to his interest and sympathy were the great industrial projects of the Pacific Coast. From the time, for example, when he spent several weeks at Drum Barracks on his way into Arizona from San Francisco, Doctor Widney found the harbor at Wilmington (now the inner harbor of Los Angeles) and its problem of development worthy of special study. There were only eighteen inches of water on the bar at low tide. Calling together a meeting of the merchants of Los Angeles, he placed before them a statement of what was needed, and a resolution requesting the Government to take steps for the improvement of the harbor. This was forwarded to Washington and the work was commenced.

* The chairman of the Alumni Committee was Dr. William R. Molony, class of 1901, who for a number of years has been and still is president of the Board of Medical Examiners of the State of California.

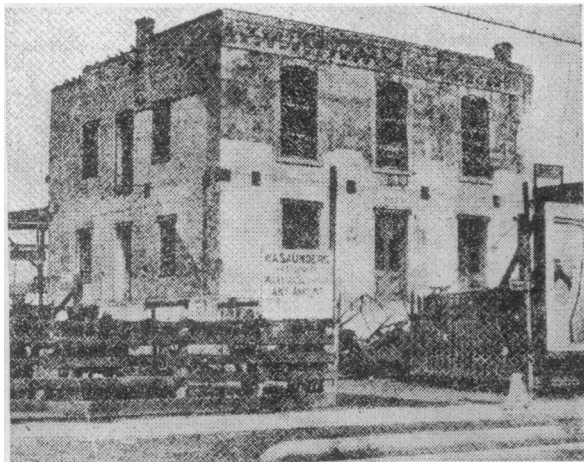


Fig. 3.—The original building of the College of Medicine of the University of Southern California (as it appeared in 1927).

The Los Angeles Record, December 13, 1927, printed the illustration, reproduced in Fig. 3, with comments as follows:

"Time has played a queer prank upon the old University of Southern California 'medical school,' 445 Aliso Street. 'Where once the voices of dignified professors instilled scientific knowledge in the minds of would-be physicians, the mournful 'hee-haw' of several hundred mules reverberates today.

"For more than twenty-five years the medical college building has housed the offices of W. A. Saunders' mule market—the largest in the southwest, says 'Jim' Conner, local manager.

"From these offices more than 1,500 work animals are rented over Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada.

"The mules are held in corrals around the building, which was built nearly a half-century ago, Conner estimates, out of brick brought to Los Angeles by sailing vessels around the Horn.

"The words, 'Medical College,' are still dimly visible above the front door of the building facing Aliso Street.

"Classrooms are now filled with mule harness. The mule market land and building are owned by Dr. J. P. Widney."

(The site of the old medical college is now a part of the grounds of the new Union Passenger Station of Los Angeles.)

Each year, too, Doctor Widney prepared papers to be placed before Congress requesting appropriations to continue the work. The depth on the bar was gradually increased to eleven feet at low tide, with an inner depth of some twenty feet. Seeing the need of a far vaster work, he wrote to Senator Leland Stanford in Washington requesting him to secure a survey appropriation for the building of a breakwater to take in the deep water of the outer roadstead. The Senator replied that he had handed the letter directly to the Secretary of War, who said that, without waiting for congressional action, he would give the required order. The survey was made and an appropriation secured for beginning the construction of the breakwater, and thus was assured the great outer harbor of Los Angeles, with fifty feet of water at low tide and no bar. This harbor, known as Port Los Angeles, now ranks second only to New York in its annual shipping.

PROPONENT OF STATE OWNERSHIP OF HARBOR TIDELANDS

Quite as interesting was Doctor Widney's association with the great fight to restrain the Huntington railroad interests from claiming the state tidelands of the harbor, under pretense that they were originally "corn land," and that the company merely wished to reclaim the marshy area as such for the benefit of the public; for again

Doctor Widney's early experience as a soldier came to the rescue of what so rightfully belonged to the people. While stationed for six weeks in 1867 at Drum Barracks, before setting out for Arizona with the wagon trains, the ever-inquiring surgeon had made himself familiar with every foot of the coast there; and when the famous land case came up in court, he asked to be allowed to take the stand. He then told how the military had landed goods from lighters right up to the Quartermaster's building on the West Basin, and that there were inclined shipways (just where the railroad company located their so-called "corn land!") on which he had seen with his own eyes ocean-going vessels being repaired; and that if the judge would go down there, and pull aside the weeds, he would himself discover what was left of the shipways! And that is what a visit to the site of the old shipways revealed.

BELIEF IN GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL DIVISION OF CALIFORNIA

A man of keen perception, there is little wonder that many years ago Doctor Widney also led in a movement for political division of the State of California; and we have his own account of what, at the time, attracted wide attention, and has since been frequently debated, pro and con. "I issued a call for the meeting," he says, "which was attended by representatives of various Southern California counties, and the records of this session of two or three days are still in my possession. A committee of distinguished attorneys was appointed, and this committee reported that the State, at the time of its admission, was already practically divided, for provision was then made that, whenever the people wished it, a division of the State into two parts could be made. Notwithstanding, however, it was so provided, that no vote need be taken upon the issue, the convention decided that our movement was premature—the time was not ripe for the step. I think that the postponement was a great mistake, and I am still in favor of such a subdivision, and into four parts, according to the harbors available: (1) Southern California, which would have Los Angeles Harbor and San Diego Harbor; (2) Point Harford at San Luis Obispo (a cut through the mountains bringing the lower San Joaquin Valley to the ocean); (3) North Central California, with San Francisco Bay, and that city as the capital; and (4) another division, centering around Eureka or on Humboldt Bay. That my views are sound was confirmed by a conversation with an eminent senator from the East, who expressed the opinion that Californians, with a coast line of more than eight hundred miles, and yet allowed only two senatorial votes (or no more than are given to little Rhode Island), are very foolish in not insisting upon a redivision, and, therefore, a new and better representation. Such a division into four parts, as I proposed in the February, 1881, issue of *The Californian*, would give us eight senatorial votes; and this division will surely come—only just wait! For the same reason, I believe that the day is not so far distant when both Oregon and Washington will

insist on a similar redistribution, with the mountains dividing the east and west portions, based on the need of a fairer representation." Continuing, Doctor Widney said: "As you will recall, I founded, with Doctors Lindley and Joseph Kurtz, just about fifty years ago (or two years before I coöperated in organizing the Southern California Medical Society*), the *Southern California Practitioner*, a journal that we all thought was needed as a medium of intercourse between the members of our medical profession in the South; and during the period when I was one of the editors of the first few volumes, we touched upon this matter of a recognition of at least two Californias, and not merely one. In possibly the initial number, I wrote: 'Distance, rugged, intervening mountains, and entirely diverse commercial and industrial interests, which are making of California two separate and distinct sections, have also, in a great measure, prevented a close union of the medical profession. Southern California has developed its own intellectual life, and its own educational system; and we believe that the time has come for the establishment of its own medical journals and societies.'

BACK TO THE LAND

"However we agree or disagree on this matter of state division, a study of the conditions may lead to the focusing of attention upon another problem, the tendency for people to congregate too much in cities. Born in the backwoods, as a youth, and long before the Civil War, I helped to fell trees and clear the land and create a new civilization in the Ohio Valley. And again, in the Arcadian life of earlier California, in the sixties (when, for a while I went into the desert country), I saw the advantage of living close to the soil. Long before there was a chamber of commerce, I planned and labored for a great harbor at San Pedro—was that the work of a visionary? And am I visionary when I say that again the cry must be sounded: 'Back to the land, or perish!' I know that it is natural for people to congregate in the interests of trade, education and religion; but with such crowding and overcrowding come the greatest of problems having to do with human health and happiness. Is it not time, then, to ask whether Los Angeles and other great cities are not already big enough?—whether they should not stop packing people so closely together?"

AS AN AUTHOR

Not at all discouraged, when, in the long ago at the Piqua, Ohio, high school his essay on the question, "Is Civilization a Failure?" scared the conservative faculty—which hastened to award the grand prize to another, more orthodox student who had written upon some such subject as "The Goodness of Being Good!"—Joseph Pomeroy Widney believed in himself as one having a natural bent for literary work; and, as the years went by, he continued to prosecute such studies and exercise in connection with the practice of

medicine. Possibly his earliest appearance in print of note after his arrival in California was his contribution to *The Overland Monthly* (Vol. X, January, 1873, page 44), of the article, descriptive of "The Colorado Desert," already mentioned,[†] in which he discussed both the possibility and the undoubted wisdom of reflooding of the dry Colorado basin; and three years later, with Don Juan Warner, of Warner's Rancho, and Judge Benjamin Hayes, founder of the Hayes Historical Collection in the Bancroft Library, he wrote and also edited the so-called "Centennial History of Los Angeles," published in 1876 by a patriotic public committee; a pioneer item, and one of the first from a Los Angeles press, considered by noted historians a real boon, and by collectors of Californiana, a treasure. Again, as previously described, he collaborated with his friend, the late Dr. Walter Lindley, in producing a very informative, illustrated guide to the "California of the South" worthy, as an introduction to the "American Italy," for comparison with the best work of Nordhoff or Ross Browne. "The Lure and the Land," later written to preserve the local color of the California he first knew; the more autobiographical "Three Americas," and the scholarly work on the "Race Life of the Aryans" (an exhaustive study alone probably justifying the conferring, by Miami University, of the honorary LL.D. degree), are only some of the more recent volumes from this author's well-stored mind and versatile pen; while "Life and Its Problems, as Seen by a Blind Man at Ninety-five," just begun, reminds one all too sadly of the great tragedy darkening the latter years of this genial, inspiring soul. A fairly complete list of Doctor Widney's publications would, therefore, include the following:

"Race Life of the Aryan Peoples," in two volumes, 698 pp., New York, 1907: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

"The Lure and the Land," 190 pp., Los Angeles, 1932: Pacific Publishing Company.

"The Genesis and Evolution of Islam and Judaeo Christianity," 238 pp., Los Angeles, 1932: Pacific Publishing Company.

"The Faith That Has Come to Me," 269 pp., Los Angeles, 1932: Pacific Publishing Company.

"Whither Away?" 152 pp., Los Angeles, 1934: Pacific Publishing Company.

"The Three Americas," 306 pp., Los Angeles, 1935: Pacific Publishing Company.

Private editions were also issued of other literary efforts, such as the three essays making up "The Way of Life," 152 pages, published in 1900; "Ahasuerus: A Race Tragedy," issued in 1915; "Via Domini," put out in 1903, and "All Fader," which appeared in 1909. From Doctor Widney's pen, too, have come a large number of pamphlets, and magazine and newspaper articles upon various topics—industrial, racial, scientific, climatic, professional, historical, political, and educational—some treating of harbor work, and national and religious issues; and he has now in press, to be issued by the same Los Angeles publishers, a volume of promise entitled, "Race Types and Race Religions."

* Note.—For many years, the Medical Society of the State of California was practically a state medical society for the region north of the Tehachapi, and the Southern California Medical Society was a similar organization, but with a more localized name, to cover the counties south of the Tehachapi.

† See April issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE, page 295.



Reproduction of an illustration in the Los Angeles Times Magazine of April 19, 1936. The legend in Times Magazine was as follows:

"Dr. Joseph P. Widney, at 94 years of age, who, on top of a full life, developed marked musical talent after his seventieth birthday, and who has written several books following his eightieth birthday, and is still active. Under an old age pension plan he would have been retired, living on the labor of others, for the past thirty-four years."

Note.—The illustration was used in an article entitled, "Will the Aged Rule America?" by Marjorie van de Water, the opening paragraphs of the article being appended hereto as a footnote.*

A WELL-SPENT AND STILL ACTIVE LIFE

Twice married—in 1869, to Miss Ida D. Tut-hill, and, after her death, in 1882 to Miss Mary Bray—and knowing, for the most part, only domestic happiness, Doctor Widney has resided for years in a stately country mansion on Washington Hill, so delightfully old-fashioned that oil lamps still furnish the only artificial illumination; near which is the Mission Bethel-El, built and maintained at the Doctor's own expense as a free "Church of the All-Father," wherein on each Sabbath morning, for many years, he has led the religious services, making more undeserved, it would seem, as it was so unexpected, the ill-fate that suddenly crossed his path and laid him low.

But let the never-faltering octogenarian tell of the terrible incident in his own words of simple fortitude: "In the year 1929 an automobile accident left me with a fractured skull, fracture of the cervical spine, several broken ribs and some injuries of the skull, leading to blindness and defective hearing, with severe and continuous pain about the base of the skull which, even yet, has hardly ceased. Nevertheless, during this time I have done much of my heaviest, literary work, besides attending to general business and church duties. But even blindness and physical disability have their compensations. The long hours of

* "Will the government budgets and tax programs of the future be dictated by an old age lobby?"

"Will the United States be run by men and women past the retirement age, who hold power by their clutch on the purse-strings of the nation?"

"Will the old-age pension, started as means of lifting the dark shadows of poverty from the twilight days of America's aged, prove to be an 'Old Man of the Sea,' growing into a crushing burden on the backs of the producers of the nation?"

"These are some of the questions raised by new predictions based on statistics of the population." . . .

darkness and of enforced silence give time for reflection and a careful review of life, its activities, and of the mighty past of the ages which, otherwise, would have been missed. Much that I have written in the books of these later years might never have been carefully thought out, and for even this blindness and silence I have learned to thank God. It was part of the schooling. His will be done! *Etiam Domine, Ad Te levabo oculos caecos!*"

CLINICAL NOTES AND CASE REPORTS

METHEMOGLOBINEMIA

RESULTING FROM ADMINISTRATION OF
BISMUTH SUBNITRATE

By J. S. HAYHURST, M.D.
Redlands

THE possibility of producing methemoglobine-mia in children, through the administration of bismuth subnitrate, has frequently been pointed out. Harold E. Roe,¹ with a forceful article, brought particular attention to this point in connection with the common use of this drug in treating the diarrheas of infants and children. Most practitioners realize the possibility of producing a condition of methemoglobinemia with acetanilid or acetphenetidin, but they are still overlooking bismuth subnitrate. Since it is the nitrate radicle that is injurious, and since bismuth subcarbonate is just as effective, the latter drug should be employed.

REPORT OF CASE

A one-year-old female Mexican child was seen at 2:30 p. m. on July 23, 1935, because of cyanosis, air hunger, and a feeling of impending death in the mind of the mother. The brief history elicited at first revealed that the child had not been ill, but had been put to bed for its usual nap at about 11 a. m. On the child's awaking, the mother noted this frightening condition; the pulse rate was too rapid to count. Even with the stethoscope, the examiner could only guess at a rate of 200; respiration rate was 50 to 60; temperature, 99.4 R; hurried examination of the chest revealed no abnormal sounds. The mother was then queried with reference to administering some type of medicine, and she admitted having given the child a teaspoonful of bismuth at about 10 a. m., because of "mucus in the throat." Later it was learned from the druggist who sold the drug that it was straight bismuth subnitrate. A diagnosis of methemoglobinemia was made, and the child taken to the hospital and put into an oxygen tent. The intestinal tract was emptied with enemata and saline cathartics, while the child was given oxygen. She improved considerably in a few minutes, so that at 3:30 p. m. her pulse was countable at 160, and respirations 44. Blood examination at entry yielded a 12 per cent methemoglobin content by colorimetric method. This determination was done quickly, using the materials we had at hand, and there is some doubt as to the accuracy of the percentage. By 7:30 p. m. the pulse rate had dropped to 134 and respirations to 34; at 11 p. m. the findings were 128 and 26. At 11:40 p. m. the child had returned to a normal appearance, so that she was removed from the oxygen tent. She was discharged from the hospital the following morning, and has remained well to date.

Medical Arts Building.

¹ Roe, Harold E.: Methemoglobinemia, Following Administration of Bismuth Subnitrate, J. A. M. A., 101:5, p. 352 (July), 1933.